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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 006639

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MLS, EAP/MTS, EAP/RSP, S/CT, INR  
PACOM FOR FPA (HUSO)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: THAILAND'S TROUBLED MALAYSIAN  
RELATIONSHIP

REF: A. BANGKOK 6595

- [1](#)B. BANGKOK 5706
- [1](#)C. KUALA LUMPUR 3691
- [1](#)D. KUALA LUMPUR 3668

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton. Reason 1.4(d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Thai and Malaysian officials have been using increasingly un-diplomatic language in the press as tensions over the situation along the Thai/Malaysian border -- heightened by publicity surrounding 131 Thai "refugees" in Malaysia -- continue. Thai MFA officials acknowledge privately that while working level cooperation continues, overall relations between the capitals are at a low point. Improving relations will require support from the highest levels; unlikely for the time being, given the ongoing rhetoric from the capitals, Thai sensitivities, and continuing violence on the Thai side of the border. Restoring cooperation is absolutely necessary in order to address the problem in southern Thailand. END SUMMARY

#### INCREASING RHETORIC BETWEEN CAPITALS

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[1](#)2. (C) On October 19, poloffs met with MFA Deputy Director General for East Asian Affairs Prasas Prasasvinitchai and Malaysia desk officer Jiraporn Sudanich to discuss the ongoing situation involving the group of 131 southern Thai Muslims who fled into Kelantan state in northern Malaysia (reftels B, C, D); and to seek Thai perspectives on the increasingly tough exchanges in the press between the Thai and Malaysian leadership over the situation in southern Thailand.

[1](#)3. (C) Rising tension began in August when Prime Minister Thaksin abruptly canceled a visit to Malaysia to meet with Prime Minister Badawi. The spat has intensified since August 30, following the flight of the 131 Muslim villagers. Thai officials claim that Malaysia broke a private agreement not to discuss the issue through the press -- sparking the current back and forth between the capitals. The involvement of UNHCR has added to the tension between Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur. These incidents play against the backdrop of the overall violence afflicting southern Thailand which has obviously been of considerable concern for neighboring Malaysia.

[1](#)4. (C) There has been daily, often harsh, exchanges in the press between Foreign Ministries. In the latest jab on October 19 FM Kantathi told journalists he would not reach out to his counterpart unless Malaysia showed "sincerity and positive signals." (NOTE: On October 19 Kantathi also responded defensively to an Organization of Islamic Conferences (OIC) statement critical of the RTG's handling of the situation in the South, suggesting the OIC condemn the militants, and not the Thai government. END NOTE)

#### THAILAND'S "MOST IMPORTANT" RELATIONSHIP HAS BEEN DAMAGED

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[1](#)5. (C) DDG Prasas said that Foreign Minister Kantathi "regrets" having to use such strong statements but indicated they feel like they have no choice. "Over the past eight weeks we have not gotten the cooperation we need from the Malaysians," he explained. Prasas said the RTG was very disappointed by the way the Malaysians have handled the group of 131, and their response to the overall situation in the South. Prasas said relations with their neighbor, their "most important," have been seriously degraded. The damage, he explained, was deep and could "have a long-term impact on our overall relationship."

[1](#)6. (C) Prasas complained that the Malaysians have not been responsive to Thai requests. Citing one example, he claimed the RTG has been trying for weeks to get photos and fingerprints from all the 131, but had been continually rebuffed, even after discussions between Thai MFA Permsec Krit and Malaysian MFA Secretary General Fuzi. (NOTE: Prasas will join a high-level Thai delegation next week -- led by director of Joint Intelligence at Supreme Command LTG Chayasit Linthong -- which will travel to Malaysia to meet

with Malaysian officials and the group of 131 in an attempt to resolve the situation. END NOTE)

17. (C) The MFA officers acknowledged that Malaysia was in a difficult position due to domestic political considerations in Kelantan state with the PAS party. However, Prasas said the Malaysians should not let "domestic political concerns" trump the bilateral relationship.

WORKING LEVEL COOPERATION CONTINUES

18. (C) While mostly downbeat about the state of Thai-Malaysian relations, our interlocutors were eager to point out some areas that remained healthy, noting that "on the ground" cooperation along the border, especially between the militaries continued. Prasas also pointed out that the ongoing quiet cooperation between police and intelligence. Prasas emphasized that Thailand and Malaysia would continue to discuss joint development projects along the border, especially in agriculture and tourism.

COMMENT - WORK NEEDED TO RESTORE RELATIONS

19. (C) The negative tone from the Thai MFA officials is not surprising -- they are taking their cues from the top. Following the brutal murders this week of a Buddhist monk and two novices (reftel A) Prime Minister Thaksin told the press that Thailand would not seek cooperation from Malaysia, "it's best to rely on oneself." The Thais are defensive about public attitudes from a fellow ASEAN member, and extremely concerned the situation in southern Thailand not be seen as an "international" issue. The Thai government has gone to great lengths to portray the violence in the South as purely a domestic issue -- tough to do when the problem is taking place along an international border.

110. (C) Beyond the high-level rhetoric and sensitivity, there is obvious working level frustration, with both the Thais and Malaysians acting like the wounded party. With no resolution expected in the short term for the group of 131 Thais in Kelantan -- and with no end in sight to the violence in Thailand's South -- there will likely be more trouble ahead for the already strained relationship between Bangkok and KL. Restoring a cooperative relationship -- at all levels -- will be absolutely essential to address the problem in Thailand's southern border provinces. END COMMENT  
BOYCE